

Special Collections

By N. ORWIN RUSH

MUCH has been said in recent years about special collections, pro and con. We at Florida State University are on the side of the pros. Just as many professors believe and many university administrative leaders say, at least, that the library is the heart of the university—more and more librarians, in this space age, realize that the special collection is the heart of the library.

By this I do not mean a special collection, that, either by the nature of its contents or by the indifference or inadequacy of the library staff, is indelibly sealed forever in a dark corner of the rare book room. I mean rather the special collection that has brought together the significant books in a specific branch of learning, whose value is well understood by the faculty most concerned, and by the library staff, and which is well cataloged, thoroughly annotated, and constantly accessible to all users of the library.

We have many such collections in our great university libraries, in this country and abroad. However, there are still many books available to the collector, and I do not agree with those who say that all the worthwhile books have been gobbled up by these American and British institutions, thus threatening to ruin the old-book market and removing the incentive that used to inspire the acquisitive collector. It is my belief that there are vastly more books still outside our libraries than are inside and that the challenge facing those who wish to build great special collections is greater than ever before.

The books that are needed to serve the manifold needs and wants of a large university are so numerous and varied

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and so constantly being added to, that half-a-million volumes seems to be about the bare minimum required for successful operation. If the right book is to be available to the scholar when and where he needs it, a million volumes are none too many, and blessed indeed is the university whose library has two million or more. Yet even those few libraries that are doubly and trebly blest must at times find themselves looking outside for that particular book most wanted by one of their more scholarly users.

Librarians are well aware that long before the half-million mark is reached, it often becomes advantageous to departmentalize into certain broad categories; humanities, technology, general education, social science, and so on. And no sooner are these breakdowns established, with trained staffs to handle them, than the pressure comes for further fragmentation within these categories to meet the needs of our increasingly specialized educational system. The right kind of special collection is nothing more than a further breakdown or fragmentation that attempts to include most or all of the books in some highly specialized branch of learning. Failing to provide such breakdowns, we fail also to satisfy the professor who is working, let us say, in nineteenth-century history, or in nuclear fission, or in one of the many branches of psychology. We soon find him buying out of his own pocket the old and new

books that he needs, and establishing the nucleus of a special collection on a shelf over his desk. It may be that these books will ultimately find their way to the library shelves, but by that time they may have historical value only, and, meantime, the library is failing in one of its major objectives, the serving of the immediate needs of the faculty. The frustration that this condition sets up among the professors is trifling compared with the frustration suffered by the librarians who must meet these demands on all sides, usually with limited resources.

Two years ago we at Florida State University heard about a private collection that was soon to become available in the field of English and American poetry, and we knew that many of these books were hard-to-get volumes of special significance to the work of our English department. The donor was ready to make his collection available with no strings attached, but he had rather specific ideas about the kind of institution to which he would give the books. When we studied these particulars, they seemed to harmonize very closely with our own ideas about the place of such collections in the educational scheme of things. I am happy to say that a year or so ago this collection came by outright gift to Florida State, and we are now enjoying its use. I should like to take time to describe this experience of ours in some detail because I believe it points to one of the very practical ways in which this problem of increasing specialization may be met.

The donor in question is John MacKay Shaw. Some thirty years ago Mr. Shaw, through experience with his own children, became intensely interested in the whole subject of childhood as a theme in poetry, and in poetry as an aid to child development. He went looking in the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library and other likely spots, but could find no place where the books that had significance in his chosen field

had been brought together for ready reference and precise study. Such writing as had been done in the field of the poetry of childhood was widely scattered and much of it was too superficial for his purpose.

Mr. Shaw decided to make a start at filling this gap. From that time on for about thirty years the collecting of books became his avocation, and to it he devoted such time as he could spare from his business life and the raising of a family. He sought out those books in which poems relating to childhood—for or about children—had first appeared. He read the books as he acquired them, making careful and extensive notes concerning their contents and their authors. When we visited Mr. Shaw in his Greenwich Village apartment, we saw two rooms filled from floor to ceiling with books, including some of the choice collectors' items in the field of American and English poetry. But more important, we were astonished to find no less than four thousand typewritten pages of carefully arranged notes throwing light on every book in the collection, truly a work of unusual scholarship. When Mr. Shaw's friend and ours, Eddie Lazare of *American Book Prices Current*, was called in to authenticate the appraisal of the collection, he testified that the pricing of the books was routine, but that the volumes of notes were beyond price and defied his skill as an appraiser. If one were to estimate the thousands of hours that went into their preparation, and appraise them at the value his employers put on Mr. Shaw's time, the notes would certainly be worth many times the value of the books themselves.

This collection is now housed in a special room in our library, with the notes, and Mr. Shaw, who has now retired from business, is spending eight months of the year preparing an annotated catalog which will extend to six or perhaps seven three hundred-page volumes. Every reference to childhood is

pinpointed and will be included in an index listing some seventy-five thousand titles. The alphabetical scheme of the index stresses the dominant word so that, in effect, we will have a subject index as well as a title index. We are reproducing a few copies, and are sharing the volumes as they are completed with some of our neighboring Florida libraries. The A-B volume was completed at the end of 1961 and the C-D volume is now at the bindery.

When this task is finished, and I think you will agree that it is a monumental one for a retired person to undertake, it will be revised to include the cross references that can be compiled only as the work proceeds. Mr. Shaw refuses to talk seriously about ultimate publication. What he wants to do is to provide the kind of a record that will interpret the collection to the scholar and that will serve as a permanent guide to its use. When that is done, he says that he will have completed the job he set for himself thirty years ago. Someone else, he says, can take it from there if it seems worth while to carry it further.

Let me mention a few of the uses to which this special collection has been put this year (even before it has been cataloged).

1. The head of our English department, who is an authority on nineteenth-century literature, was surprised to find in the collection a good selection of Matthew Arnold, including a first edition of *The Strayed Reveller*, not an easy book to come by. He didn't quite see the significance of such a book in a collection that had been described to him as "children's books." But Mr. Shaw promptly turned to page 101, which has the first printing of "The Forsaken Merman," beginning "Come, dear children, let us away;/Down and away below," a poem which has been reprinted in countless anthologies of children's poetry. Mr. Shaw showed him similar quotations in his Swinburnes, his Coleridges, and his

Wordsworths. Since then an assistant professor of English has been giving special study to the five distinct issues of Tennyson's *The Princess* which are in the collection since it is the book in which "Sweet and Low" first appeared. Until we received the Shaw collection, these could not be found in our library and perhaps nowhere in Florida.

2. A graduate assistant in the music department spent all his time for several weeks between teaching assignments, searching out the early American songs in the collection, an experience that he has called the most stimulating of his school career. Among the nuggets he unearthed, much to his surprise, was a copy of the second printing, in 1832, of Lowell Mason's *Juvenile Lyre*. He recognized it as the forerunner of Mason's pioneer introduction of the teaching of music in the American schools a few years later. Mr. Shaw's interest in the book stemmed from the fact that it is the earliest printing in a musical setting of "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

3. A teacher in the University School, preparing a series of television programs on American history for fifth graders, came to the collection seeking poems depicting the symbols of America—the Liberty Bell, the flag, the Statue of Liberty, etc. With some help from our normal standbys—Grainger and Brewton—she found some that were suitable, but a much richer selection would have been brought to light if the index now in preparation had been completed.

4. Our home economics department is regularly calling on Mr. Shaw to discuss with students in its child-development courses the part that poetry should play in family life, and displays of books from the collection have added greatly to the effectiveness of these discussions.

5. The library school is especially proud of the Childhood in Poetry collection, and its students are exposed to a very practical example of the care and feeding of rare books. You may be sure

that these future librarians are getting a very special indoctrination from the custodian in the point of view of the private collector and how he may be useful to them in their future work.

And so it goes. As members of the faculty in various departments of Florida State come to know what is in this new resource of theirs, they find their own uses for it. We are adding to it, under Mr. Shaw's guidance, buying more books as our resources permit, and Mr. Shaw matches what we do with purchases which he immediately adds to his gift. The special collection in this instance is therefore not a static thing but a very vibrant and growing one.

I need not emphasize how utterly impossible it would be for any university library, and I do not except Harvard or Yale or even Texas, to build such a collection, or to hire such a custodian. And this points up the place of the private collector in our scheme of things, which was so well epitomized by Fred Adams in a talk he gave at the dedication of the Lilly library at Indiana two years ago. You will remember that he sketched the contributions that private collections have made to library operations throughout recorded history, and stressed that "had there been no libraries in Byzantium and Asia Minor, and no patrons in Italy willing to pay for importing them, the Renaissance as we know it could never have developed." He reminded us that large numbers of the books of early American collectors can still be identified in our public and university libraries. I commend his talk to the attention of anyone still holding doubts about the value of special collections to the modern library.

How then are we, the librarians and book lovers of today, to foster these important resources and husband them for our own and future generations? For our part, as a university, we have decided to cooperate with the Amy Loveman \$1,000 national award for the best book collection by a college senior. Under the

sponsorship of the Friends of the FSU library and the local bookstores, we are offering prizes for the best book collections in our own senior class, and if it seems worthy we will submit the best of these in the national contest next year. In this and other ways, we must encourage the love and care of books among the student body, who will be the scholar-collectors of the future, and whose collections will, in many cases, some day find their way into our libraries. With the trend toward shorter working hours and more leisure time, we may even in some cases acquire the collector as well as the books, as in Mr. Shaw's case.

What a wonderful opportunity a university librarian has to give aid and support to a professor who is struggling to build up a special collection for the university library. Librarians should do everything within their power to help such professors. Don't feel remorse if you find yourself giving them a little more support for this purpose than you really think you should—even at the expense of a department which fails to recommend enough book purchases on its own. If you are a cataloger don't let your feelings go too far in condemning such professors for the great amount of time you have to spend cataloging so many different editions of the same book which may seem to you to be unnecessary. If a professor has the genuine interest, desire, knowledge, and ability to build up an outstanding collection in a limited field you are spending the library's funds wisely by giving him a little extra share of the book budget.

It is not only your duty to help these professor-collectors (and there will be only a very few of them) who seek your assistance in getting together a real special collection—but it is your duty and opportunity to learn about the special interest of the faculty, along these lines, and do all you can to stimulate a real interest in forming a special collection of value to your library. The proper professor with the proper encouragement

and help can develop into a really valuable collector for your library.

With the multiplicity of disciplines, and the increasing flood of books, it is somewhat frightening to contemplate the task that confronts any one university in attempting to house and care for these collections when they materialize in the future. But there is solace in the corresponding advance of the sister sciences of duplication and communication.

With what we know now about the potentialities of microfilming and electronic information networks, we can easily foresee a system by which the special collections in all of Florida's colleges can be pooled in such a way that the riches of any one of them can be promptly made accessible to any student or faculty member in the state. If this can be done for one state, it can be done regionally, even nationally. And a worldwide exchange is not beyond the bounds of possibility when we consider that communications satellites are already in preparation.

There is no reason why the custodians of learning should be any less daring in their thinking, or any less imaginative in their planning, than the scientists who rely on us for the preservation and dissemination of their lore. Indeed, if we lag behind them, we will greatly hamper them in their efforts to advance the peaceful progress of our civilized world.

After considerable delay Congress recently authorized the appointment of a staff of specialists to organize for research purposes the seventy-five thousand children's books now "widely dispersed and inadequately cataloged" in the Library of Congress. These books comprise the materials that have been used over the years for what our forefathers used to call, in the words of their title pages, works "for the instruction and entertainment of young persons." As such they must be reckoned just about the richest cultural heritage we have in this country. It seems obvious that these seventy-five thousand books should be carefully organized into

not one but many special collections, each with its well-annotated catalog. Only thus can these riches of the mind be made easily accessible, be intelligently used by the scholar, and become understandable to the layman. And what is the cost of this worthy objective? Is it in the millions or even billions that the Congress is accustomed to discussing in committee? No. The figure that I have seen is \$22,745.

Is it not a serious commentary—and to bibliographers and librarians a shocking one—on the state of our society, that the same legislative committee that approves millions of dollars as gifts to our universities for research having the end result of military weaponry and billions for the cultural and economic advancement of other nations would delay their approval and authorization of a budget of twenty-three thousand dollars to improve such an important research resource.

In fairness to the Congressmen, we must recognize their dilemma. They are expected to maintain a defense establishment that will prevent the destruction of the Library of Congress itself. But there are two ways to destroy a great library and its collections. One is by nuclear fission. The other is by neglect. It is the duty of the Congress to prevent both of these catastrophes.

At least one member of the Florida State University faculty substantiates the belief that the special collection is the heart of the library. One of our young English professors was heard to say that if he is ever tempted to leave the university the thing that he will miss most will be a special collection—the Shaw collection of Childhood in Poetry.

I invite your attention to the article Lawrence Durrell, one of England's currently popular writers, contributed to the London antiquarian book fair of 1962. In speaking of special collections he said,

The collector is to the ordinary book-man what the great wine expert is to someone

with a good average nose; his knowledge is really ripe because he not only savors the contents of his books but he takes pleasure in the placing and dating of them. His historical sense of his subject is invaluable because only through him does the deep past link hands with the future. We must not grudge him his attention to detail, his search for the anomalous and the recondite. Only by this careful attention to the historical aspect of his subject can he contribute and

mould the books of the future which will one day themselves become the books of the past. His detective work may repair masterpieces which owing to vagaries of printing and the carelessness of writers have been cast out imperfect upon the market.

Librarians too may repair masterpieces for their libraries by helping in the assembling of special collections and making sure that they are useable. ■■

Children's Books at Philadelphia Free Library



SPECIAL COLLECTIONS of children's books in the Free Library of Philadelphia are described in a booklet recently produced by the children's department and the rare book department of the library. The Rosenbach collection of early American children's books spans three centuries (1682-1836); the original collection of 816 volumes has grown to some four thousand housed in the rare book department. The Elizabeth Ball collection of horn books includes some one hundred fifty examples, one dating from about 1500; another is from the twentieth century. The American Sunday School Union collection of historical children's books is comprised of the union's own publications from its founding in 1824. The Kate Greenaway collection in-

cludes first editions, a complete set of almanacks, variant bindings and presentation copies, watercolors and drawings. The Beatrix Potter collection includes first editions, presentation copies, letters and photographs, and the manuscript complete with original watercolors of *The Tailor of Gloucester*.

The Arthur Rackham collection consists of more than four hundred first, limited, and variant editions as well as original drawings and watercolors, embracing the entire working life of the artist from 1893 to 1940.

These collections, housed in the rare book department of the Free library, are augmented by other collections—modern, historical, pictorial, and foreign-language groups—in the children's department.

The initial letter beginning this account is taken from the cover of the booklet, in turn reproduced from a work in the Rosenbach collection. ■■